

ENGINEERING HERITAGE RECOGNITION PROGRAM

Proposal to Nominate

Argyle Cut

as an Item of Engineering Heritage Interest

Item Name:	Argyle Cut		
Other/Former Names:	NA		
Locality:	The Rocks , Sydney		
Address:	Argyle Street, The Rocks, Sydney		
Co-ordinates	Lat: -33.858795179721575 Lon: 151.20673095885198		
Current Owner:	The Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority of Place Management NSW is responsible for the eastern section up to the Bradfield Highway. The Sydney City Council is responsible for the western part.		
Original Owner:	Sydney Municipal Council		
Current use:	Pedestrian and vehicle thoroughfare		
Former use:	Pedestrian and vehicle thoroughfare		
Proposed use:	Pedestrian and vehicle thoroughfare		
Item Condition:	Excellent		
Designer:	Government Architect, Edward Hallen in 1832		
Builder:	Convicts under Lieutenant Colonel George Barney, and Sydney Municipal Council		
Started:	1843 by convicts	Completed: Widened:	1864 by Sydney Municipal Council 1920s by Public Works Department
History:	<p>In the early days of the Colony the sandstone ridge which gave its name to The Rocks was a formidable barrier to movement from one side to the other. The need developed for a convenient link between the commercial centre around Sydney Cove and the maritime developments of Millers Point, Darling Harbour and Walsh Bay.</p> <p>A private company proposed constructing the 'cut' and charging a toll, but the plan was turned down by Governor Bourke and the Legislative council, and the Government decided to undertake the work.</p> <p>A plan for the Argyle Cut was drawn up in 1832 by the Government Architect Edward Hallen, which showed the proposed bridges over the streets above, a view and the inclination of the road.</p> <p>Excavation of the Argyle Cut was commenced in 1843 by Colonial Engineer Lieutenant Colonel George Barney with convicts from Hyde Park Barracks - some of them in chains, using picks and shovels. Spoil from the excavation went into reclamation of the estuary of the Tank Stream, behind the Circular Quay seawall. However, the convicts only succeeded in excavating the two ends as the rock proved too hard for manual removal, and the project was abandoned.</p> <p>Eventually, in 1864 labourers from Sydney Municipal Council cut down the</p>		

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	<p>middle to a trafficable level using explosives.</p> <p>Overhead bridges were built for Gloucester Street in 1862, Cumberland Street in 1864 and Princes Street in 1867-68 (the latter was demolished as part of the Harbour Bridge construction).</p> <p>As part of the improvements undertaken by the Sydney Harbour Trust in 1911-12, Gloucester and Cumberland Streets were realigned and two of the road bridges over the Argyle Cut were replaced by a single bridge at Cumberland Street, and the Argyle Stairs were constructed.</p> <p>In the 1920s the Public Works Department constructed a concrete arch bridge to take the southern approaches - the Bradfield Highway, of the Sydney Harbour Bridge over the Cut, the Princes Street Bridge was demolished and the Argyle Cut was widened.</p> <p>The concrete arch bridge that took Cumberland Street over the Cut was replaced by the Public Works Department in 1956-57 with the third prestressed concrete bridge built in Sydney. The bridge has eight simply-supported post-tensioned concrete girders, with a cast-in-place concrete deck.</p> <p>The Argyle Cut is on the State Heritage Register.</p>
Description:	<p>The Argyle Cut is a deep cutting in hard Sydney sandstone, that provides a direct connection between Millers Point and The Rocks. It has a two-lane roadway, footpaths on both sides and is crossed by two bridges - the Cumberland Street bridge of 1957 and the Bradfield Highway c 1930.</p> <p>On the wall of the Cut is an inscription that refers to the completion of overhead bridges: <i>Completed 1867-1868, by Sydney Municipal Council, Charles Moore, Mayor.</i></p>
Significance:	<p>Argyle Cut is of State heritage significance for historical, technological and scientific reasons, and is of local significance for The Rocks and Sydney area for social, aesthetic and reasons of rarity.</p> <p>The Argyle Cut demonstrates the changing labour market in Sydney in the 19th Century.</p> <p>It has associations with convict labour, Colonial Engineer George Barney, construction of Circular Quay seawall, and the acceptance of responsibility of urban growth and public works by the Sydney Council.</p> <p>Argyle Cut has historical significance as an early east-west route across The Rocks, as an imposing example of convict public works, and as evidence (in its ongoing changes, crossings and widening) of improvements in the provision of access and infrastructure, including the work of the Sydney Harbour Trust, and construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and its approaches.</p> <p>It has aesthetic significance with the deep cutting providing a dramatic feature in Argyle Street.</p> <p>It has been ranked along with Busby's Bore and the building of Circular Quay seawall as one of the most impressive engineering feats in early Sydney and NSW.</p> <p>The Argyle Cut has social significance as an important feature in The Rocks conservation area, and contributes strongly to the character of The Rocks.</p> <p>The Argyle Cut is a rare example of early responses to the geographical difficulties presented to urban growth.</p>

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Webpage Summary:	<p>In the early days of the Colony the sandstone ridge which gave its name to The Rocks was a formidable barrier to movement from one side to the other. The need developed for a convenient link between the commercial centre around Sydney Cove and the maritime developments of Millers Point, Darling Harbour and Walsh Bay.</p> <p>Excavation of the Argyle Cut was commenced in 1843 by Colonial Engineer Lieutenant Colonel George Barney with convicts from Hyde Park Barracks - some of them in chains, using picks and shovels. Spoil from the excavation went into reclamation of the estuary of the Tank Stream, behind the Circular Quay seawall. However, the convicts only succeeded in excavating the two ends as the rock proved too hard for manual removal, and the project was abandoned.</p> <p>Eventually, in 1864 labourers from Sydney Municipal Council cut down the middle to a trafficable level using explosives.</p> <p>Overhead bridges were built for Gloucester Street in 1862, Cumberland Street in 1864 and Princes Street in 1867-68.</p> <p>As part of the improvements undertaken by the Sydney Harbour Trust in 1911-12, Gloucester and Cumberland Streets were realigned and two of the road bridges over the Argyle Cut were replaced by a single bridge at Cumberland Street, and the Argyle Stairs were constructed.</p> <p>In the 1920s the Public Works Department constructed a concrete arch bridge to take the southern approaches - the Bradfield Highway, of the Sydney Harbour Bridge over the Cut, the Princes Street Bridge was demolished and the Argyle Cut was widened.</p> <p>The concrete arch bridge that took Cumberland Street over the Cut was replaced by the Public Works Department in 1956-57 with the third prestressed concrete bridge built in Sydney.</p> <p>The Argyle Cut is on the State Heritage Register.</p>		
Engineering Theme:	Transport – Road Construction		
Heritage Listing:	NSW State Heritage Register, SHR ID 01523		
References/Sources:	This nomination quotes extensively from the NSW State Heritage Register listing of Argyle Cut, SHR ID 01523		
Nominated by:	Michael Clarke		
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EHA Branch:	Sydney	Nomination Date:	28 March 2024

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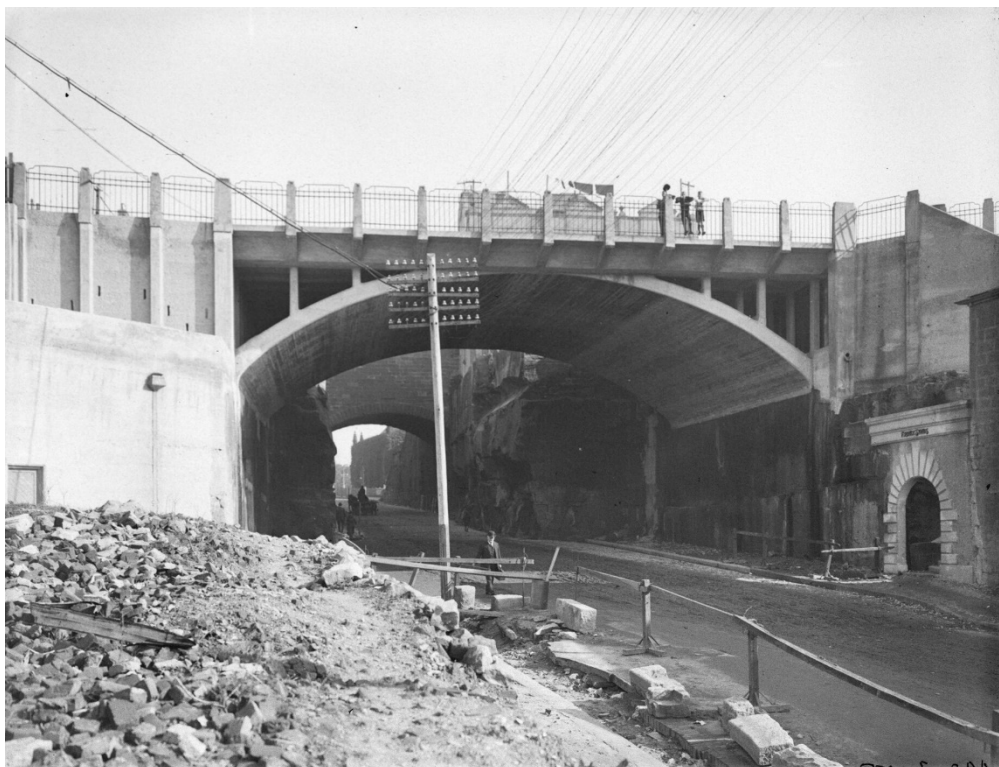
Argyle Cut c.1853

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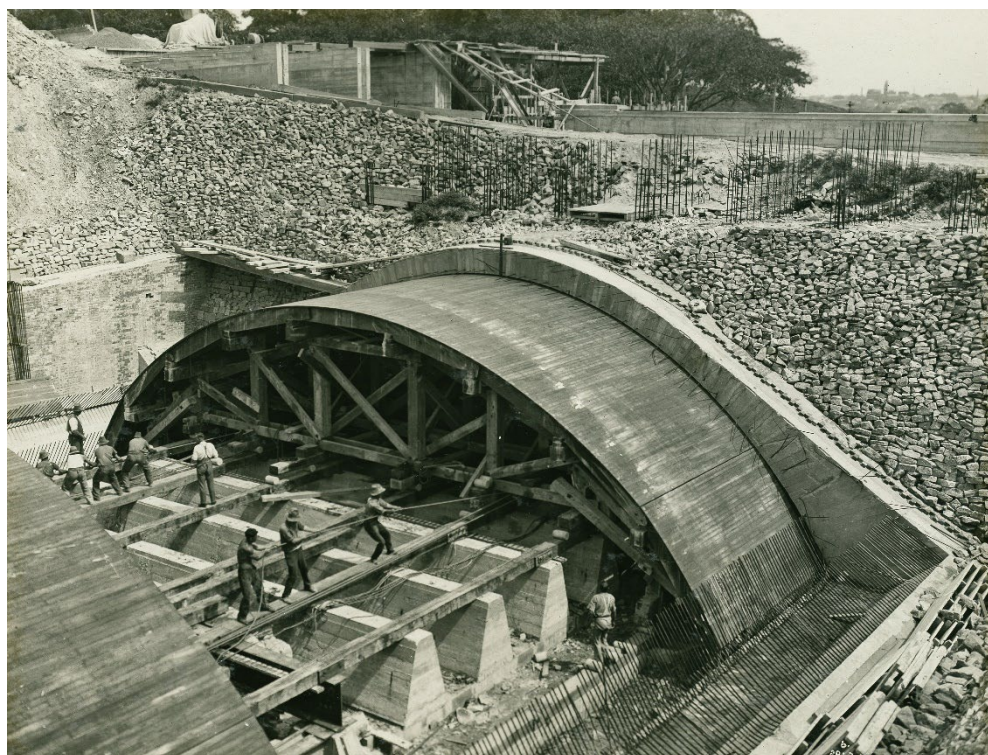


Argyle Cut. Three early bridges

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Argyle Cut. 1912 bridge, and Argyle Stairs on right



Moving formwork of Bradfield Highway bridge over Argyle Cut, 20 March 1931
NRS12685 Sydney Harbour Bridge Photographic Albums

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Widening Argyle Cut, 19 August 1931
NRS12685 Sydney Harbour Bridge Photographic Albums



Demolishing Princes Street bridge, 19 August 1931
NRS12685 Sydney Harbour Bridge Photographic Albums



Argyle Cut, 2008. Bradfield Highway over The Cut.
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Looking west through Argyle Cut with 1957 Cumberland Street bridge
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Looking east through Argyle Cut
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1957 Cumberland Street bridge

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1912 Argyle Stairs

Michael Clarke

